

Help-Seeking Behavior Levels among UNNES Guidance and Counseling Students Reviewed from Gender Perspective

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Abstract

Students' mental health problems are frequently triggered by the demanding adjustment to college life. This study aims to examine the students' tendency to seek a professional help and identifies the gender differences in this behavior. The sample involves 232 undergraduate students from Guidance and Counseling department at Universitas Negeri Semarang. The data analysis of this study reveals that there are no appreciable variations in the tendency of male and female students to seek a professional help when they recognize the need for counseling. However, the level of confidence that the two genders have in mental health professionals differs significantly. Interestingly, the different Guidance and Counseling students, who are expected to learn about counseling, have different perceptions on how much they can trust mental health practitioners.

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INTRODUCTION

According to World Health Organization (WHO) report quoted by Kompas, one in seven children worldwide between the ages of 10 and 19 suffers from a mental illness, making up 13% of the global disease burden in this age range. In addition, the depression, anxiety, and behavioral disorders mostly cause the adolescents' disease and disability. Meanwhile, suicide ranks as the fourth most common cause of death among those ages 15 to 29.

According to Databoks, as of October 18, 2023, there have been 971 suicide cases in Indonesia, with Central Java Province reporting the highest number at 356 cases. This amount exceeds the 900 incidents of suicide that occurred in 2022 (Muhamad, 2023). On World Mental Health Day, two suicide attempts and two suicides were reported in Semarang City, both involving female victims. It was determined that these victims were young adults or adolescent (Utami, 2023).

Arnett et al. (in Kazi & Sandbulte, 2023) have shown that 75% of individuals who will have a mental health disorder experience their first onset during young adulthood (i.e., 18-25 years). In addition, according to Thornicroft (in Amado-Rodríguez et al., 2022), 70–80% of young adults and adults do not receive proper mental health care. A number of obstacles that adolescent encounter can have an impact on their mental health, including the transition from adolescent to college life, lifestyle, and an increase in their level of independence and personal responsibility.

Findings by Nurfadilah et al. (2021) reveal that students at Universitas Al Azhar Indonesia tend to have a neutral attitude towards seeking psychological help; they are often unfamiliar with the existence of psychological services and hold negative stigmas towards them; and the campaigns for psychological services have also not been successful to conduct. According to Graham and Zheng (in Schislyaeva & Saychenko, 2023), mental health among students is considered a serious issue and a significant concern for universities and society due to the rapid development of education and aggressive competition. The development of mental health education is an essential part of political and ideological work in universities and research institutions.

Despite the evidence of mental health issues among students, the utilization of mental health services and help-seeking behavior remains relatively low as globally reported, including in Indonesia. One mental health service, counseling, aims to support people in realizing their full potential and contributing to society. In response to these mental health issues or traumatic events, Rickwood et al. (in Clark et al., 2020) define mental health help-seeking as getting comprehension, advice, information, treatment, and general support.

When conducting a research related to the help-seeking behavior, other variables, such as gender, are frequently taken into account. It is theoretically possible for established gender roles to impact how attitudes

towards seeking psychological help (Noble et al., 2021). According to Helgeson (in Noble et al., 2021), the idea of seeking psychological help conflicts with the expectations masculinity of a young males, such as toughness and independence.

Addis and Mahalik (in Ratnayake & Hyde, 2019) also indicate that gender role socialization and adherence to traditional male norms play a significant role in understanding these gender differences. It is suggested that seeking help, which necessitates relying on others and expressing emotional distress and concerns, may contradict the stereotypical messages received by males regarding the importance of physical toughness, independence, and emotional control.

In addition, research by Rafal et al. (2018) found that male students demonstrate low mental health literacy, limited knowledge of mental health, weak mental health beliefs, poor mental health attitudes, high levels of self-stigma regarding help-seeking, significant negative impacts of help-seeking on self-esteem, and low intentions to seek professional help.

According to Cotton et al. (in Ratnayake & Hyde, 2019), males are more prone than females to utilize drugs and alcohol as maladaptive coping mechanisms when dealing with mental health problems. According to Harland and McCready (in Best et al., 2016), reveal that when males experience problems or stress, they often hesitate to seek help due to fears of being perceived as weak or unusual. However, seeking help online can be a more comfortable

option, as it is more discreet and does not expose them to others. As a result, numbers of males start looking for help online. After considering the advantages and disadvantages of each option, they can decide whether to continue seeking help online or explore more formal options.

In their study, DeBate et al. (2018) discovered that college males have low intentions to seek care for mental health-related issues. This is worsen by low mental health literacy, particularly with regard to normative beliefs about seeking help for mental health problems, self-stigma, and unsupportive attitudes toward help-seeking.

Furthermore, Coppens et al. (in DeBate et al., 2018) indicate that differences have been identified between males and females in help-seeking behavior. It is observed that males are less likely to be receptive to professional help. According to Eisenberg et al. (in DeBate et al., 2018), males tend to say that their friends and family are their primary sources of support rather than seeking out professional help. Gonzalez et al. (in Dong et al., 2022) also add that males are more likely to have negative attitudes regarding mental health care than females.

The results from previous related literature differ from Ratnayake dan Hyde (2019). They identified gender differences in help-seeking behavior and found that males are less likely to seek help from doctors or general practitioners for personal or emotional issues, as well as for suicidal ideation, compared to females. Given this inconsistency, there is a need to further

explore the role of gender in openness to psychological help-seeking behavior.

Based on the preliminary research results from Guidance and Counseling students at Universitas Negeri Semarang, it was found that 45% of students decided not to seek any help from a counselor while 70% expressed hesitation in seeking help from a counselor. Furthermore, 65% of students felt horrible when they could not solve their problems independently, and 95% frequently encountered mental health services through digital media. However, only 5% felt that counseling services offered digitally were more comfortable and efficient. It was also discovered that cost is a factor that influences the choice to psychological help. Additionally, students indicated that they could not find any professional mental health help programs in their area, demonstrating a lack of accessibility.

According to the background presented, this study aims to analyze the level of help-seeking behavior reviewed from a gender perspective among Guidance and Counseling students at UNNES. This research is expected to serve as a foundation for further studies to explore additional variables affecting help-seeking behavior, such as social support, access to mental health services, cultural factors, and to develop technology-based interventions that are easily accessible and appealing to students.

RESEARCH METHOD

The population in this study consists of all Guidance and Counseling undergraduate students at Universitas Negeri Semarang, with the total of 553 students. The sample was obtained using proportional stratified random sampling techniques, involving 232 students. The sample comprises 44 male students (18.97%) and 188 female students (81.03%).

In this research, the instrument used is the Attitudes towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help: A Shortened Form developed by the researchers. This scale consists of 24 statement items and includes two indicators: Recognition of the Need for Psychotherapeutic Help (with 12 items) and Confidence in Mental Health Practitioners (with 12 items). Each item on the scale offers five response options: (5 = Strongly Agree, 1 = Strongly Disagree). After a test analysis, 22 items were found to be valid, while 2 items were discarded for use in the study. The reliability test for the help-seeking behavior variable yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.891.

This research utilizes a quantitative ex post facto approach with a causal-comparative design to investigate the causal relationships between the variables. Data analysis was conducted descriptively and inferentially using chi-square tests through SPSS 25 software.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

According to the finding analysis, Guidance and Counseling students at UNNES generally have a strong tendency when it comes to help-seeking behavior ($M = 83.08$ and $SD = 11.072$).

The analysis results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 The Results of Statistic Analysis of Help-Seeking Behavior

Score Range	Category	F	%
X > 99	Very High (VH)	18	8
88 < X ≤ 99	High (H)	50	22
77 < X ≤ 88	Moderate (M)	94	40
66 < X ≤ 77	Low (L)	55	24
X ≤ 66	Very Low (VL)	15	6
%	75,53%		
Mean	83,08%		
SD	11,07		
Category	T		

Information:

HSB = *help-seeking behavior*, X = total

Based on the difference test using chi-square, the results indicate that no different tendency for help-seeking behavior regarding the recognition of the need for psychotherapy/counseling between male and female respondents were identified ($\chi^2 = 5.87$, $p > 0.05$).

The majority of the tendencies for recognizing the need for psychotherapy/counseling were concentrated at low levels (L = 34.1%, P = 23.9%) moving towards moderate levels (L = 31.8%, P = 49.5%).

However, as in confidence in mental health practitioners, a difference was found between male and female respondents ($\chi^2 = 10.32$, $p < 0.05$). Among male respondents, the level of confidence in mental health practitioners tends to be low level (29.5%) moving towards moderate level (34.1%). In contrast, among female respondents, the level of confidence in mental health practitioners tends to be at moderate level (38.8%) moving towards high level (25.5%). The statistical results are presented in Table 2.

Tabel 2 The Results of Chi-Square Test

Aspect	Gender	HSB (%)					χ^2	p
		VL	L	M	H	VH		
Recognition of the Need for Psychotherapy	M	4.5%	34.1%	31.8%	20.5%	9.1%	5.87	>0.05
	F	5.9%	23.9%	49.5%	16.5%	4.3%		
Confidence in Mental Health Practitioners	M	11.4%	29.5%	34.1%	9.1%	15.9%	10.32	<0.05
	F	6.4%	22.9%	38.8%	25.5%	6.4%		

Information:

VL = Very Low; L = Low; M = Moderate; H = High; VH = Very High

The findings show that males and females recognize the need for psychotherapy or counseling in the same amounts. Males' low recognition of the need for counseling can be linked to the disparities in attitudes between the sexes. According to Takeuchi et al. (in Topkaya, 2021), males in Turkish society are expected to refrain from publicly expressing their emotional issues because this is typically viewed as

a sign of weakness that could embarrass them or their families.

Additionally, it is also discovered that males tend to have more difficulty trusting mental health practitioners compared to females. Social stigma is strongly tied to the possibility that males and females play different roles in society, which may have an impact on how they seek help. This aligns with Helgeson (in Noble et al., 2021) that the

need for psychological help conflicts with the expectations society for young males regarding masculinity—such as toughness and independence—conflict with the pursuit of psychological help.

Consequently, the self-stigma related to help-seeking behavior among male students is greater than female students (Topkaya, 2014). Coleman (in Clark et al., 2020) explains that traditional masculinity consists of social norms emphasizing competition, strength, the avoidance of emotions and perceived femininity, and action-oriented behaviors.

In contrast, females are more willing to talk about emotional problems and ask for help from others, even in facing the similar stigma. According to Ang (in Picco et al., 2016), compared to males, women typically have more positive attitudes around asking for professional assistance and are more prepared to admit when they personally need it. As expressed by Ang (in Picco et al., 2016), females generally exhibit more positive attitudes toward seeking professional help and are more willing to acknowledge their personal need for professional help compared to males.

Gulliver et al. (in Hapsari & Krianto, 2023) explain that a lack of mental health literacy is reported as one of the barriers to help-seeking behavior among male adolescents and male adults. Altweck et al. (in Hapsari & Krianto, 2023) also stated that low health literacy among the general public and non-mental health professionals can lead to inadequate handling of mental health issues, such as difficulties in identifying sources of help and

determining appropriate coping strategies.

Reduced behavior in seeking care for mental health concerns can also result from a lack of confidence in mental health practitioners. This is in line with the research by Merikangas (dalam Clark et al., 2020), which repeatedly demonstrates that compared to female adolescents, fewer male adolescents with mental health difficulties seek psychological care.

An increase in technologically driven online help-seeking innovations has been made in response to males' mistrust of mental health practitioners. Formal online help-seeking, or asking for assistance or advice from people outside of one's social network, offers minimal danger of social stigmatization, preserves personal identity, and improves anonymity. This strategy can provide greater possibilities for safe disclosure and assistance, as well as aid to alleviate trust difficulties that might develop in informal and online help-seeking (Best et al., 2016). In addition, according to a study conducted by Clark et al. (2020), a larger propensity to seek assistance from online sources is correlated with higher levels of masculinity.

The differences between males and females in seeking psychotherapy and confidence in mental health practitioners represent a complex issue that requires a multidimensional approach. By understanding the underlying factors contributing to these differences, we can develop more effective interventions to improve access

to and the quality of mental health services for everyone.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion written, it is concluded that the level of help-seeking behavior, as reviewed from a gender perspective, shows positive and significant results due to a high tendency. In addition, the tendency for male and female respondents to recognize the need for psychotherapy or counseling does not differ in terms of help-seeking behavior. Nonetheless, a difference in tendency is found in the aspect of confidence in mental health practitioners between male and female respondents.

Several recommendations are given for counselors and future researchers based on this research findings. For counselors, it is suggested to adopt a more personal approach to build strong trust with each student, particularly males, through a more empathetic and individualized approach. Additionally, counselors should tailor their counseling styles to better align with the preferences and needs of both male and female students.

For future research, it is recommended to explore the reasons for the differences in trust toward mental health practitioners through qualitative studies (e.g., in-depth interviews) to delve deeper into why male students tend to be less trusting of mental health practitioners compared to females. It is also important to examine additional variables that affect help-seeking behavior, such as social stigma, family roles, and prior experiences. Moreover,

developing more effective interventions, such as e-mental health applications or online platforms that provide accessible counseling services and mental health information for students, would be beneficial.

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